

## Veterans: The Source of Our Freedom

“When drinking water, remember its source.” This famous Chinese proverb illustrates a crucial principle that we should all have—to be thankful. Many Americans today take for granted one of the most important things we have, freedom. In our world, freedom is truly precious, and we should never forget to thank the veterans who loved their country enough to stand in defense of America and keep our nation free.

To be a veteran is to be an embodiment of courage itself. A veteran is someone who showed great bravery in face of some of the worst circumstances of the world, witnessing horrors that many people can’t imagine. They saw things every day that could shatter anyone—the deaths of innocent civilians, friends who were never to walk again, places without hope. Still America’s veterans stayed strong and didn’t give into their fear, didn’t run from battle, and never gave up. Their amazing courage saved countless lives and improved millions more.

The unwavering loyalty of America’s veterans is incredible. Veterans left behind their families, their homes, and their lives to serve our country. They were ready to sacrifice their lives and risk everything to protect the freedom of the American people. However, they didn’t just protect America—America’s veterans have also often fought to improve the lives of people all over the world. They have

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battled for democracy, basic human rights, and to free the oppressed. Sometimes, veterans have even fought for causes that they don't believe in. The loyalty of these veterans is especially awe-inspiring, for they are willing to risk life and limb for something they really don't think is worth it. Regardless of how veterans view the war they fought in, though, all should be honored for their resolute loyalty under perilous risks.

America's freedom is a treasured thing, and was not easily bought. So many veterans fought to keep America free, and so many lives were lost in the protection of our nation. We should never forget the veterans' sacrifices, and we should always honor those who stood in defense of our country. If you drink water, remember its source—and if you live in America, if you cherish its freedoms and value its principles of democracy, honor its veterans.

## SECOND PLACE

Emily Miller

### Veterans, Hamburgers, and Lifejackets

Have you ever eaten a burger without a bun? Most people haven't because it isn't really a hamburger if you don't. The buns basically top off the burger and give the extra oomph that it needs. In the same way the military in our country gives us the oomph and protection that is imperative for the safety of our country. Our military isn't just about men and women wearing uniforms to look professional. It is about them fighting for our freedom. When you jump in a lake with a life jacket on, you trust that you won't sink, right? Well, in the same way when we are going through our daily routines we trust that our military is going to keep us safe. Actually we usually don't even think about it, we just take it for granted. Who are the buns of our burgers and the lifejackets in the lake? These are the veterans of the United States.

My grandpa served in the Navy during World War II. Sometimes when we think about veterans we just get this general picture of someone who is tough and know's how to shoot a gun, but I personally know a veteran and he is so much more than that. He's a human being who feels pain, gets scared, and makes mistakes just like the rest of us. So how do these people get the bravery and courage to lay their lives on the line for millions of people that they do not even know? The answer to this is it takes a very special person to be a veteran.

My grandpa is the wisest person that I know. He has taught me so much by what he says, but even more by his actions. Maybe this is why veterans are so unique, they don't just talk a big game, they take their thoughts and beliefs and put them into action. Without the veterans of our country we probably wouldn't have the same freedoms that we have today. Veterans have the

will to push themselves even when they do not feel like it. The worst part about it is that they are sometimes not appreciated as much as they should be.

Maybe the next time you are eating a hamburger you will think to yourself that the reason you get to sit there and eat a burger is because of hundreds of thousands of people who have given up their lives just so you can live yours freely. Perhaps when you are at the lake about to jump in and realize that the reason that you are not afraid to jump into a hundred foot lake is because of the trust you have in your lifejacket. In the same way we need to remember that there are people out there fighting that should and need to be honored and appreciated for the things that they give up just for you and me.

# THIRD PLACE

## The Best

By: Graham Ratermann

A young, clean cut man bounds down the last few steps of an airplane and into his wife's outstretched arms. A homeless man in a wheelchair rolls past; his pants are tattered and reveal his missing leg. A CEO of a successful company sits at her desk looking at pictures, remembering the men and women with whom she served. These people are veterans and to me veterans are special because they are brave, committed and they sacrifice so much.

The first thing that makes veterans stand out from ordinary people is their bravery and courage. These men and women confronted fear and pain everyday. They suffered hardships so we could live our lives the way we wanted. Not all veterans ran headlong into enemy fire or dived on a live grenade to save their comrades, but all veterans no matter if they were cooks or fighter pilots did something incredibly brave by enlisting. They signed a contract saying that if it came down to it, they would fight for our country and lay down their lives if necessary. Not all veterans were on TV or in newspapers for their heroism, but they all deserve to be commended for even joining the military.

Veterans show their commitment by giving up many years of their lives to serve and protect. They also show commitment through their actions, when things were tough veterans didn't quit; they sucked it up and kept going. There have been many occasions when veterans showed perseverance and commitment, the winter at Valley Forge was the first. Cold, tired and hungry, those veterans held out and lit the first fires of American resilience. At the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, frozen, outnumbered two to one and

surrounded, American soldiers didn't give up. No, they had made a commitment to themselves, their comrades in arms and to the American people to fight with all they had. A more recent example is the hunt for Osama Bin-Laden. It took ten years but the commitment was there and finally Osama was brought to justice. These are just a few examples of the commitment veterans make.

The last and most important reason why veterans are important is because they sacrifice so much. Many miss their kid's childhood while they're overseas. Many don't see their loved ones for months, even years on end. Some are injured in combat and carry with them physical and mental scars for the rest of their lives. Some veterans even make the ultimate sacrifice for their country. They lay down their lives to protect the sacred freedoms we hold dear.

Veterans are special because they are brave, committed and sacrifice so much. Civilians can't begin to imagine what veterans went through and we are eternally grateful for what veterans did, for giving us an opportunity to live life to the fullest, for giving us that chance to be the best we can be.

# HONORABLE MENTION

Why Are Veterans Special

By Mariah Miranda

When I was five, my mother, my brother and I lived in a small apartment on the lower level of a 3 story complex. On a regular night, my brother Joe, would use his upper body strength to lift himself up by the door frame to his bedroom, breathing hard and counting reps. "Private Miranda, go down and give me 15!" he'd yelled at me as I watched TV. I was always reluctant but did them anyway, struggling after the fifth one as he laughed at me, and continued to call me "Private Miranda." Mom laughed when Joe would tickle me 'til I had tears running down my face, and then told us dinner was ready. From then on, I watched my older brother pursue a career of military and watched him make sacrifices to get there.

Many teenage boys see military as a "plan" since they feel their life is going nowhere. My brother, Joe, didn't see it that way though; he knew his dream was the Army. As a child his father, <sup>a Hungarian immigrant whose father was</sup> a prisoner of the World War II, taught him the history of war. When he was a pre-teen he read war books and had begun to call himself G.I. Joe, and later changing his name to Joe when he became an adult. As a teenager he was a star athlete on his high school varsity basketball team and at the age of 17 he begged to have his papers signed for basic training. I was only in grade school at the time, but I had looked up to him with admiration as he lovingly chastised me about joining the army when I would be of age. I still remember his camouflage suit lying amongst his dirty laundry on the floor of his room as he'd practice pushups and lifts. For his entire college career he served on several bases, including Fort Benning. He'd made a steady pace up the rankings into a lieutenant and when he was 22, he served his first trip in 2005 to the Middle East. "Just come see me when I bring my men back alive" was what he said the last time he'd have contact with his family, a phone call to his mother on Mother's Day. And since then Joe has

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served overseas in Afghanistan more than 3 times. He is special because he sacrificed his life with his family and his home to be the best lieutenant for his squad.

In our lives, hardships are a common understanding that each of us endure and therefor grow from. But veterans have experienced hardships unlike anything else. The act of leaving home and knowing you may not return is a risk most of them take in order to defend their country. Joe took the initiative to protect our country because he did what he truly believes in, and therefor he, and every veteran, is special.